

**MICHAEL BAZZETT**

**In the Himalayas**

**1**

I climbed the mountain  
to where the old man sat  
nested in his white beard.

Look to the moon, he said,  
and learn that you will be  
shaved down to nothing;

you will be skinned clean;  
you will be eaten by sky  
and become only darkness.

Okay, I said. Point taken.

That was when I noticed  
he was levitating  
about an inch above the granite.

Can you go any higher?  
I asked.

Not really, he said,  
but I can do this—

And he gave a gentle push  
using only his fingertips  
and coasted over the rock  
like butter in a warm pan.

Would you like to try it?

I nodded, reached out  
and gave him a firm nudge  
as I would a plastic puck

riding its cushion of air  
on an air hockey table  
in a suburban basement

only realizing my error  
once his bewildered face  
glided over

the edge of the cliff.

**2**

The next guy looked  
pretty much like the first:  
turban, lotus position, etc.

As soon as I arrived,  
he started speaking:

The moon instructs us  
how to be whittled,  
sliver by sliver,  
like a shard of bone—

Got it, I nodded.

He looked at me kind of  
quizzical and suspicious

and maybe a little  
disappointed, like  
he was just getting warmed up.

He opened his mouth  
to offer a bit more,  
but I held up my hand:

Seriously, man. Duly noted.  
The first guy filled me in.

His eyes lit with delight.  
You know Kevin?

I smiled and nodded,  
like I was chuckling at  
what a rascal Kevin was:

Dude lives on the edge.  
Know what I'm saying?

It's the Himalayas, man,  
he said, his smile vanishing.  
We all live on the edge.

**3**

The jails in the Himalayas  
are not nearly as cold  
as one might expect.

They are also unexpectedly  
generous with the yak butter  
and the secondhand tea.

So much of life is about  
managing expectations,  
I thought. I reached

to scratch my head,  
forgetting for a moment  
the bamboo slivers

beneath my fingernails  
and the iron cuff  
that held my wrist

chained to the wall  
where I leaned  
in the chilled alpine light.

**4**

Mindfulness,  
mindlessness,  
I chuckled to myself.

I mean, really.  
Who's to say?